

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

December 6, 2018

Mark Zuckerberg  
Chairman and Chief Executive Officer  
Facebook, Inc.  
1 Hacker Way  
Menlo Park, California 94025

Dear Mr. Zuckerberg:

We write regarding the disturbing news that the father of a 16-year old South Sudanese girl used Facebook to announce an in-person auction of his daughter as a child bride.<sup>1</sup> South Sudanese law defines a child as anyone below 18 and states that every child has the right to be protected from early marriage. In South Sudan, approximately fifty-two percent of girls are married before age 18 and seventeen percent marry before they turn 15.<sup>2</sup> We find it unacceptable that your company is directly contributing to an abhorrent practice.

As recent news reports suggest, leadership at Facebook has taken a hands-off approach when it comes to matters of security and the spread of disinformation.<sup>3</sup> This appears to still be the case, as Facebook only became aware of the auction “three days after the girl was married and more than two weeks after the day the family first announced its auction on the platform, on October 25.”<sup>4</sup> Even more troubling are reports that human rights groups flagged the posting.<sup>5</sup>

The South Sudanese man who purchased the young woman paid 530 cows, three Land Cruiser V8 cars and \$10,000.<sup>6</sup> Local media outlets called the girl the “most expensive bride in Africa.”<sup>7</sup> Activists worry that such a high price could prompt others to use Facebook as a means for auctioning off girls.<sup>8</sup> Given the expansive reach of Facebook, and the repercussions from incidents such as this, you have a responsibility to put an immediate stop to these practices on all your platforms. While your company’s mission may be to “make the world more open and connected,”<sup>9</sup> the auction of a child bride on your platform is a human rights violation that threatens girls’ lives, health, and future prospects. It is time that Facebook start taking real responsibility for abuses wrought on its platforms. It is not enough to say that you were unaware of the problems on your site. Thus, we request answers to the following questions:

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.cnn.com/2018/11/20/africa/south-sudan-child-bride-facebook-auction-intl/index.html>

<sup>2</sup> [https://news.vice.com/en\\_us/article/8xpqy3/a-teenage-girl-in-south-sudan-was-auctioned-off-on-facebook](https://news.vice.com/en_us/article/8xpqy3/a-teenage-girl-in-south-sudan-was-auctioned-off-on-facebook)

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/11/14/technology/facebook-data-russia-election-racism.html>

<sup>4</sup> [https://news.vice.com/en\\_us/article/8xpqy3/a-teenage-girl-in-south-sudan-was-auctioned-off-on-facebook](https://news.vice.com/en_us/article/8xpqy3/a-teenage-girl-in-south-sudan-was-auctioned-off-on-facebook)

<sup>5</sup> <https://techcrunch.com/2018/11/21/facebook-failed-to-stop-a-child-bride-being-auctioned-on-its-platform/>

<sup>6</sup> *Id.*

<sup>7</sup> *Id.*

<sup>8</sup> *Id.*

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/11/14/technology/facebook-data-russia-election-racism.html>

1. Why did it take so long for Facebook to become aware of the auction of the South Sudanese child bride?
2. What steps did Facebook take upon learning of the auction and subsequent wedding?
3. What proactive measures is Facebook taking to ensure that no persons are trafficked, auctioned, or sold on any of your platforms?
4. What policies does Facebook have in place to alert law enforcement to instances of trafficking on its platforms?
5. How does Facebook handle reports from users alerting it to possible instances of trafficking?
6. Are you aware of other instances of persons being sold, auctioned, or trafficked on any of your platforms? And if so, please provide detailed descriptions of those instances.

Given the seriousness of the child bride auction, we request answers to the above questions by December 20, 2018. Thank you in advance for your cooperation.

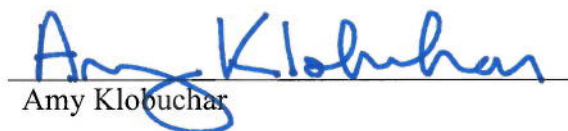
Sincerely,

  
Robert Menendez

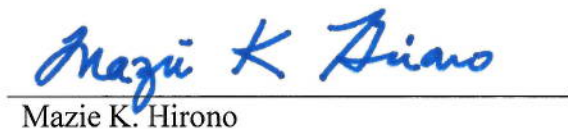
  
Richard J. Durbin

  
Dianne Feinstein

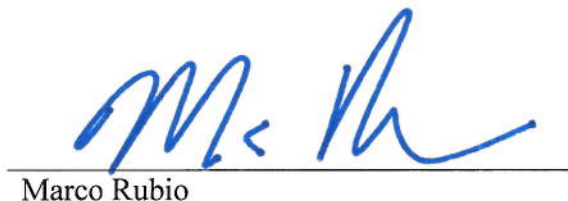
  
Richard Blumenthal

  
Amy Klobuchar

  
Tina Smith

  
Mazie K. Hirono

  
John Kennedy

  
Marco Rubio